

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-10

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AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 990

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MARR IC NATO

SUBJECT: IDF RETENTION ISSUE - DISCUSSION WITH
THORARINN THORARINSSON

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THORARINN THORARINSSON, IN AN
OBVIOUS PROBING MANEUVER, SUGGESTS IDF ISSUE CAN BE
LAID TO REST FOR AWHILE IF USG WILLING TO STIPULATE IN
WRITING BASE WILL BE CLOSED BY 1982. MY RESPONSE WAS
THAT SETTING A TERMINAL DATE IS UNREALISTIC.
END SUMMARY.

2. DURING POLISH NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION LAST NIGHT
THORARINN THORARINSSON (PROGRESSIVE PARTY CAHIRMAN OF
FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF PREVIOUS ALTHING)
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APPROACHED ME AND WANTED TO TALK ABOUT THE DEFENSE

ISSUE. HE REMARKED WITH AN AIR OF ASSURANCE THAT ICELAND WILL HAVE ANOTHER LEFTIST GOVT UNDER OLAFUR JOHANNESSEN AND WILL BE COMPOSED OF ALL PARTIES EXCEPT INDEPENDENCE PARTY. HE SAID IT WILL BE THE INTENTION OF THE NEW GOVT TO CONSULT WITH ME IN ABOUT 2 OR 3 WEEKS REGARDING THE NEXT STEPS IN THE IDF NEGOTIATIONS, AND STATED HE HOPED I WOULD BE READY AT THAT TIME TO OFFER SOME SOLUTIONS WHICH WOULD BRING ABOUT AN AMICABLE SETTLEMENT. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION AS TO WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE A SETTLEMENT HE MENTIONED A PLANNED PHASE-DOWN OF AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL AND A DATE BY WHEN ALL OR "ALMOST ALL" WILL BE WITHDRAWN. HE ADDED THAT 1976, THE DATE IN THE APRIL GOI PROPOSALS, WAS UN-REALISTIC BUT ASKED WHETHER 1978 WOULD BE MORE REALISTIC.

3. I REPLIED THAT THE ONLY REALISTIC ANSWER IS (A) WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF STAYING IN ICELAND FOREVER, AND (B) THAT NO ONE CAN PRESENTLY FORECAST WHEN THE BASE WILL BECOME REDUNDANT. A 15-MINUTE DISCUSSION ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD THEN ENSUED, DURING WHICH THORARINSSON ADMITTED THE WORLD WAS NOT AS PEACEFUL AS HE HAD BELIEVED IT WAS OR HOPED IT WOULD BE. THIS GAVE ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLAIN TO HIM, AS I HAVE DONE SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE, ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BASE IN USC'S DETENTE EFFORTS, POINTING OUT THAT ICELAND IS DELUDING ITSELF IF IT THINKS IT CAN HAVE A SECURE FUTURE WITHOUT THE BASE IN THE ABSENCE OF REAL DETENTE.

4. THORARINSSON STATED THE BASE HAS BEEN A DIMISIVE ISSUE TOO LONG IN ICELANDIC POLITICS AND IT WAS TIME TO SETTLE IT SO THAT ICELAND COULD COME TO GRIPS WITH OTHER THINGS. I REPLIED THAT WE, TOO, WOULD LIKE TO SETTLE THE ISSUE, BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SECURITY OF THE NATO NATIONS. HE THEN ASKED WHETHER WE WOULD AGREE TO STIPULATE IN WRITING THAT IT IS OUR INTENTION TO PULL OUT BY 1980. WHEN I REPLIED IN THE NEGATIVE, HE ASKED ABOUT 1982. MY ANSWER WAS THE SAME. I REMINDED HIM OF THE OFFER WE MADE LAST NOVEMBER DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS OF OUR WILLINGNESS TO HOLD JOINT DISCUSSIONS PERIODICALLY TO ASSESS THE STATE OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC AND I REMINDED

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HIM TOO THAT WE HAVE A GOOD RECORD OF MAKING REDUCTIONS AND MODIFICATIONS AT THE BASE OVER THE YEARS ON OUR OWN INITIATIVE WHEN THE SITUATION WARRANTED. I REMARKED THIS WAS A MORE CREDITABLE COMMITMENT THAN THE COMMITMENT HE WAS PROPOSING. WE WERE THEN INTERRUPTED AND THE CONVERSATION ENDED WITH BOTH OF US AGREEING TO CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION AFTER A NEW GOVT WAS FORMED.

5. COMMENT: IT SOUNDS AS IF THORARINSSON IS EXPECTING SOME TOUGH DEMANDS BY THE SDP ON THE DEFENSE ISSUE BEFORE AGREEING TO JOIN A LEFTIST GOVT. OUR CONVERSATION WAS AN OBVIOUS PROBE ON HIS PART. HIS PROPOSAL WAS SIMILAR TO THE ONE MADE TO US SEVERAL TIMES LAST YEAR INFORMALLY BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER, EXCEPT THE TERMINAL DATE WAS 1976 INSTEAD OF 1982. AT THAT TIME THE PROPOSAL CONTAINED "AN ORAL UNDERSTANDING" THAT THE AGREEMENT COULD BE RENEGOTIATED IF THE POLITICAL-MILITARY SITUATION WARRANTED. WE TURNED THIS DOWN. THORARINSSON HAD GREWG INFLUENCE ON ICELAND'S FOREIGN POLICY AND WITHIN HIS PARTY DURING THE PREVIOUS GOVT AND HE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO EXERCISE A STRONG ROLE IN ANOTHER PP-LED GOVT. HIS PROPOSAL REPRESENTS A GREAT SHIFT IN HIS OWN THINKING. ALTHOUGH IT MAY REPRESENT THE NEW VIEWS OF HIS PARTY AS WELL, AT THIS POINT IN TIME IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE IT ALSO REPRESENTS THE PEOPLES ALLIANCE'S VIEWS.

6. OTHER CONVERSATIONS DURING THE EVENING: WITH OLL CHAIRMAN MAGNUS TORFI OLAFSSON, WHO PREDICTS ANOTHER LEFTIST GOVT WITHIN 2 WEEKS AFTER HARD BARGAINING. WITH AN IP MEMBER OF ALTHING WHO SAID GEIR HALLGRIMSSON WILL ADVISE PRESIDENT TODAY OF FAILURE TO FORM A NEW GOVT. WITH GYLFI GISLASON, CHAIRMAN OF SDP AND NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF ALTHING WHO DENIES HIS ELECTION WAS CONDITIONAL ON SDP JOINING A LEFTIST GOVT. GISLASON AND I HAVE DATE TOMORROW EVENING TO DISCUSS SDP VIEWS ON DEFENSE ISSUE.
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